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ABSTRACT

The need to prepare teachers in both language awareness and other content-area courses is discussed. The role of language awareness and related activities in all areas of the curriculum, including subject-specific courses, study skills, and native, foreign, and community languages is examined. Specific suggested areas of training for teachers include examination of their own control of language use, linguistic principles, teaching techniques, the teacher's role, observation strategies, and teacher involvement in course design and classroom interaction. (MSE)

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AWARENESS WORK FOR TEACHER
TRAINING (PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE)

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SOME IMPLICATIONS OF LANGUAGE AWARENESS WORK FOR TEACHER TRAINING (PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE)

B G Donmall

This paper concerns the training of all teachers, both as contributors to the teaching of Language Awareness courses and as teachers of language within their own subject areas.

Developments in the sphere of Language Awareness have their roots in the Bullock Report of 1975, A Language for Life. The title itself is a pertinent reminder of the significance and scope of the field. A number of perceived truths, half-known truths and intuitions concerning inadequacies in school pupils' operational skills in the sphere of language, both as mother tongue *per se* and as an instrument in the learning/teaching of all curricular subjects were articulated (although regrettably, foreign languages were ignored). Despite the breadth of coverage in the report and an appreciative response among educators, however, lack of clear direction and guidance as to how to tackle the issues raised meant that a number of initiatives taken failed to stand the test of time. Attempts to marry the insights of applied linguistics experts to the field of practice have suffered sufficient setbacks for a further call on the area of linguistics for support and guidance to seem for the time being unlikely to be fruitful.

Some initiatives have survived profitably, however, and at this grassroots level, eventually in combination with specialists in language, it is developing a coherence and direction under the term Language Awareness.

AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE (IN USE)

What is our topic? If we have to handle "it" we must know what "it" is.

The term Language Awareness has at times been challenged as indefinite, woolly, unclear. The writer suggests, however, that these criticisms arise from educators' familiarity with a curriculum heavily weighted with courses of factual knowledge content which is readily retrievable for regurgitation in test conditions, and assessed according to criteria of the ilk of 'right or wrong', 'good or bad'. Those of us who are conditioned to gear all our teaching to examination requirements rightly anticipate that assessment of "awareness" and associated competencies would be difficult. While the nature of some courses may be susceptible to formal assessment (see the work of A.J. Tinkel at The Oratory School) others may serve

purposes for which formal assessment is inappropriate if not impossible (see paper on Evaluation and Assessment). First, let us consider the language element:-

a) Language

Language is the prime means of human communication. It facilitates - or inhibits - our progress through life. It is at once the focus of learning and the means of learning other things. It is also the means by which we are taught. Competence in language - perceptive reading of messages as well as the effective conveying of them, the ability to use language as a tool for one's own learning purposes and in development as an individual in a complex social environment - is the first basic factor which affects a pupil's progress in all sectors of the curriculum and in all extra-curricular areas. 'Language in use' is necessarily in an environmental context. The context affects the language use and may also be affected consciously by the language user.

b) Awareness of language (in use)

'Awareness of Language (in use)' is a person's sensitivity to and conscious perception of the nature and functioning of language in both his/her immediate and wider environments. We use the expression 'Language in Use' to underline the fact that it is the purposeful functioning of language in operational contexts which is the focus of our attention.

c) Language Awareness activities

Language Awareness activities and methodological procedures are described in detail in other papers (The Report, Methodology Related to Language Awareness Work, descriptions of core school activities and the paper by A.J. Tinkel). The following may serve as a useful reminder of some points which are particularly pertinent in the context of this paper.

Broadly speaking, work in the field of Language Awareness is directed towards the development of that conscious perception of and sensitivity to language allied in explicit terms to skill and performance. The latter may both precede as well as succeed the former. The pupil already has high performance skills in and intuitions about language. These are the springboard for pupil-based investigations during which the unconscious and intuitive becomes conscious and explicit.

However, if at this stage of discussing 'language in use' categories are established and terms applied to denote them, it is important to remember that it is not the categories

themselves nor the terms of demarcation but the criteria governing their identification which must be the focus of attention and remain so in any application to language activities. We must underline that this is no reversion to "purposeless parsing pastimes". Our purpose is not description but interpretation.

The following may serve to give an indication of our intentions. Insights gained into 'language in use' permit attention to be directed, for example, to appropriacy of language in use not to value judgements about it. (Not "that's not proper English" but "when might you be more likely to say that?"). We may hope that, in addition, appreciation of appropriacy of language use may lead to tolerance of difference rather than condemnation through ignorance. Heightened perception may also allow us to concentrate on effectiveness of giving and reading messages rather than commenting on accuracy of language use. ("I think he's got the message over that he wants his son to wash his car but I think he'll have to make it a bit clearer that the son can borrow the car afterwards before he'll actually get round to doing it".)

To sum up: we have established the importance of language for human inter-action in life and its significance for the pupil in all operational areas of the school curriculum. We have seen that it is our responsibility to develop our pupils' sensitivity to and conscious perception of language in use. We have indicated what we mean by the term Language Awareness and have given an indication of the essential nature of Language Awareness activity. We have ascertained that the resource base is to be the pupil himself/herself and it is his/her development as an individual in society which must be fostered. What does this mean in the school context?

LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

a) Courses in Language Awareness

There is considerable variation in the objectives, content and design of these courses in schools which as a result may be taught at any point in the pupil's school career, but their special nature is the focus on language itself. Broadly speaking, we may say that they share the following intentions: to arouse interest and stimulate motivation, to examine attitudes, affect positively the conveying of messages and to heighten perception of responses, to improve manipulation of operational situations and to contextualise learning. Given that this is the case, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that courses of this kind will also serve to foster pupils'

progress via language in other curricular areas. However, these must also be addressed in their own right.

It should be stressed that teachers of these language-specific courses may well not only be linguists by training. For example, the musician has an important role to play in the training of the ear, the biologist in the handling of the processes of the physical activities involved in production and reception of language and the historian on the topic of language development and change conditioned by prevailing circumstances.

b) The subject-specific classroom

For all teachers of all subjects there is subject-specific matter expressed in subject-specific language to be conveyed to pupils. That language, be it vocabulary items, phrases, expressions, or language conventions (e.g., use of the impersonal statement in preference to the first person singular form) must be taught and must be learnt. They may first be encountered in the teacher's speech, in the text book or other materials. The teacher must be ready:

- a. not to assume either the pupil's knowledge or the pupil's 'natural acquisition' competence;
- b. to anticipate the language and respond accordingly, both in his/her own controlled use and teaching of same and in the materials in use in the classroom;
- c. having ensured understanding by all pupils, to check retention of understanding, for example, in the next lesson but also subsequently and by all pupils, to ensure the pupils' capacity to respond to and/or use actively the language appropriately;
- d. to ensure pupil participation in the teaching/learning process.

We see then that there are three clear areas requiring attention: the teacher's own use of language, the language contained in materials and the pupil's own reproduction of language. Clearly the teacher must be in a position to control all three.

In addition to subject-specific language and conventions of language use, however, there are other exchanges, e.g., instructions or evaluative comments made by the teacher which may incorporate new vocabulary items and phrases and novelty of expression or complexity of structure which require mastery.

The pupils for their part must learn to express themselves in the classroom context, for example, in asking questions, expressing difficulty, seeking help or clarification.

c) Study skills

There has been a burgeoning of courses in study skills with a greater or lesser explicit emphasis on language aspects in the post-Bullock period. These may include:

- a. how to take notes
- b. the use of a dictionary
- c. the use of a library
- d. how and where to seek information in and out of school
- e. how to learn for specific purposes.

Again, one thing is abundantly clear, viz that at the very heart of all the above lies language as the means of access.

d) The spectrum of language learning

In the Language Awareness class all language interests meet. It is no coincidence that this Working Party was set up after ground work had been carried out by previous working parties for example, into areas of convergence of interest and operation between teachers of mother tongue English and foreign languages and into considerations associated with minority community languages. History, variety, range, register, common and disparate elements of language(s), for example, which are common to most Language Awareness courses are of direct relevance to EMT, ESL, EFL to MCLs and FLs¹ in all their forms and with their many varied intentions. It should serve to foster their interests, both collectively and individually. (It is no replacement for them).

In language-based classes pupils who already speak at least one language in addition to English are an especially rich resource.

THE TEACHERS' NEEDS

It must now be clear that all teachers, be they teachers of language or languages or teachers of other subjects have need of instruction and guidance in language on their initial training courses. Ideally

¹ EMT-English as Mother Tongue, ESL-English as second Language, EFL-English as Foreign Language, MCLs-Minority Community Languages, FLs-Foreign Languages.

this work should feature fully at the initial stage, and indeed on a number of courses very useful work is carried out despite difficulties, most notable of which is perhaps the limited time available. Since language use is fundamental to every area of teaching and learning, however, the suggestion that it can be tackled "briefly" or "superficially" on initial teacher training courses, to be developed more fully at some later stage during service is simply unhelpful. However, it will be necessary for some time to come, no doubt, to extend into the in-service area what in some cases has been inadequately tackled on initial training courses. Nor may we forget the masses of teachers already well launched on their careers whose needs must be met during service. Given the considerable disparity between individual initial training courses it would not be helpful to try here to indicate demarcation points between pre- and post training but to pin-point needs and to suggest responses and to emphasise again the importance that the responses be made early.

a) Language in use/Linguistics

Clearly, in order to programme and sequence their pupils' development in the field of Language Awareness, the teachers too must have a conscious and specific awareness themselves. They must acquire a knowledge of the structures and functions of language(s) and master the techniques of purposeful language analysis. As Ronald Carter expressed it: "The rules governing 'language' must be a vital part of the teacher's knowledge; otherwise pupils' engagement with language whether it be in spelling or in poetry or in the lived experience of the individual, can never really be progressive, systematically developed, or properly evaluated and assessed".²

The teacher must have control of the language he/she uses, of that contained in the teaching materials and of that received and used by the pupils, and in the subject-specific classroom, in Language Awareness classes and in interaction for the pupils' personal development. He/she needs to be able not only to foster progress but also to perceive problems and to analyse them in order to make appropriate corrective responses. In learning these skills he/she must acquire the tools for analysis and the language of description of language structures, functions and the features of discourse appropriate to his/her own learning.

This systematic study of Language in use must indeed be,

² Ed R Carter. Linguistics and the Teacher. Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1982, p.8.

according to widely accepted definitions of the term, an area of linguistics; nor should we shy away from use of the term, as long as we are clear about the criteria for its use. We are not concerned here with 'categorisation for its own sake', nor with unintelligible jargon, nor again with long-winded investigations at the end of which little useful about practice can be stated. In Language Awareness work in the school context theory and practice coincide to their mutual benefit and in order that this development may continue, the association of Linguistics with Language in Use in Given Contexts, must not only be maintained but strengthened.

b) Teaching techniques

In spite of the controversies which still abound concerning pupils' acquisition of new language, indeed, what constitutes "learning language", there are none-the-less some statements which may be agreed by practitioners as well as theorists of most schools of thought on procedures which are either necessary or helpful in the controlled development of language skills. These may include, e.g.:

- explicit training in the listening skill;
- frequency of hearing of new language items;
- frequency of use;
- pupil participation and involvement in the learning process;
- contextualised language learning;
- checking the various acquisitional stages;
- building in and responding to feedback.

These techniques may be new to non-language teachers or overlooked, for example, by foreign language teachers when involved in interaction via the mother tongue.

c) Teaching roles in Language Awareness courses

It has been emphasised in other papers³ that essential to the methodology of teaching in Language Awareness courses is the pupil as the base point, as the springboard and as resource.

3 See especially A J Tinkel, Methodology related to language at work.

Pupil involvement in the whole process is paramount. The nature of the work is investigation and discovery by the pupil. It is the role of the teacher to define the objectives and draw up the syllabus, to select materials and programme the course.

He/she is to impose the start and end of each section, to sequence them to best effect, to supply the unifying thread(s) to the investigations, to guide pupils' analyses, to lead from the intuitive to the consciously perceived. In addition to all this he/she does also have a role as imparter of knowledge, since some Language Awareness courses may include, for example, aspects of unknown languages, how hearing and speech organs function etc. The skills appropriate to these kinds of methodological approach must feature, too, in teacher training.

(d) Observation strategies

With the focus on classroom language activities, teachers in training must be equipped with strategies for observation. Even experience and success in teaching do not necessarily bear with them the capacity to observe the teaching and learning of others and to comment with discernment and discrimination on interactive processes. Nor do teachers necessarily possess the language of comment or categorisation. In the former instance we might well say that the teachers' intuitions and insights need to be brought to the point of explicit and conscious awareness, and then, with acquisition of language of the second instance, to analyse and discuss systematically and purposefully.

Most importantly perhaps, the teacher must acquire the capacity for observation of his/her own classroom and the language activities operational in it.

(e) Teacher involvement

Whenever possible it is important that the teacher him/herself should be a full participator in the production and functioning of any course he/she teaches. Where the course is new, all who may teach it should be involved in establishing the aims and objectives, in the overall design as well as the selection (and production) of material, determining methodology (methodologies) and in the making of decisions affecting the development of the course. Especially he/she must be a part of the continuing monitoring process - preferably not the only source of evaluatory response - but most certainly not excluded from it!

In many, if not the majority of instances teachers in school are

presented with courses "to be taught", material "to be covered", language structures or functions "to be learnt" by the pupils and materials "to be used". This is determined often, for lower classes by the head of department and by examination requirements higher up the school. The dreadful negative effects on teaching to examination syllabuses which do not reflect agreed teaching syllabuses are well known. Less frequently emphasised but none-the-less real are the dreadful negative effects on the teachers themselves. However, it has been seen that whilst Language Awareness courses may lead to qualifications based on assessment (see work at the Oratory School), many serve interests which defy formal or even informal assessment. Thus, the focus may be placed and remain firmly on the objectives of the programme and on the agreed teaching of the same. The positive benefits to the teacher and, it should follow, to the teaching/learning process should be considerable.

Teacher training courses should therefore usefully take account of the necessity to train participants in the skills of course design, structure, programming and monitoring as well as the methodology of teaching.

Additionally, just as it is true for pupils that they are their own best resource in developing their skills in Language Awareness, so also are the teachers, who must necessarily acquire their own Language Awareness, a valuable basis for their own investigations at teacher training level. Involvement and participation is as important for the learners/trainees at this level as for the pupils they will eventually teach.

TEACHER TRAINING COURSES

The focus of work of this Working Party has been Language Awareness courses and these, as can be seen from descriptions of core school activities as well as from initiatives taken elsewhere which have been brought to our attention, may take any one of a variety of forms in order to cater for a wide range of objectives. They are being taught in primary classes, in sixth forms and at stages in between. It is clearly not possible, therefore, to be too tightly prescriptive about the training of teachers of courses whose purposes are of such diversity. Similarly, each subject has its own language items and conventions of language use which require specialised attention and will require specialised training. However, drawing together strings from the points already made in the paper, the following stages are offered for consideration by those setting out to train teachers to teach Language Awareness courses as well as other individual curricular subjects.

a) Common to all teachers

1. Development of the teacher's own language awareness

- a. in general use
 - b. specifically related to the school context.
2. Acquisition of the language of description and analysis (for defined purposes).
 3. Understanding of the development of the person through and in tandem with language including relevant aspects of socio and psycho-linguistics.
 4. Finding out how pupils learn and how the teacher can foster pupils' learning both of language per se and of other matters via language.
 5. Observation skills.
 6. Inter-action and language development in all classes, including problem-analysis and response.
- b) Divergence according to specific circumstances

(e.g. Language Awareness in the Physics class, learning to use the Library etc.). At this point we address ourselves solely to:

Language Awareness Courses

1. Understanding the topic.
2. Defining objectives.
3. Designing, structuring, programming a course.
4. Establishing methodology.
5. Decision-making and monitoring.
6. Evaluation (and assessment).
7. Materials production.

For further suggestions the writer would recommend reference to the Bullock report and to the detailed as well as the summary sections.

Language Awareness work is still in its infancy. Developments in schools will influence training programmes and vice versa. This is to be encouraged. We are not at a stage where we would wish to make decisive statements about training course contents and design. The writer feels able to speak on behalf of the Working Party in expressing the hope that this work will be developed further. We should wish to support NCLE involvement in the teacher training sector, to include Language Awareness, if this should be proposed as an area needful of further work, for the next cycle of NCLE activity.

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